



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

October 5, 2005

Ms. Amy M. Columbus
Assistant District Attorney
Dallas County
133 N. Industrial Blvd., LB-19
Dallas, Texas 75207-4399

OR2005-09037

Dear Ms. Columbus:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 233797.

The Dallas County District Attorney (the "district attorney") received a request for information in a criminal file, particularly documents that the requestor believes will be pertinent to a civil suit. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, 552.130, and 552.1325 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.¹ We have also considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See Gov't Code § 552.304* (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Initially, we note that the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022 provides that:

the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure under this chapter unless they are expressly confidential under other law:

- (1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108[.]

¹This letter ruling assumes that the submitted representative sample of information is truly representative of the requested information as a whole. This ruling neither reaches nor authorizes the district attorney to withhold any information that is substantially different from the submitted information. *See Gov't Code §§ 552.301(e)(1)(D), .302; Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).*

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). The submitted information constitutes a completed investigation made by the district attorney. A completed investigation must be released under section 552.022(a)(1), unless the information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 or expressly confidential under other law. However, because information subject to section 552.022(a)(1) may be withheld as provided by sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.130, we will address your arguments under these exceptions.

Section 552.108 provides in pertinent part:

(a) Information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime is excepted from [required public disclosure] if:

...

(4) it is information that:

(A) is prepared by an attorney representing the state in anticipation of or in the course of preparing for criminal litigation; or

(B) represents the mental impressions or legal reasoning of an attorney representing the state.

Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(4). A governmental body that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why this exception is applicable to the information that the governmental body seeks to withhold. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977); Open Records Decision No. 434 at 2-3 (1986).

In *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379 (Tex. 1994), the Texas Supreme Court held that a request for a district attorney's "entire litigation file" was "too broad" and, quoting *National Union Fire Insurance Co. v. Valdez*, 863 S.W.2d 458 (Tex. 1993, orig. proceeding), held that "the decision as to what to include in [the file] necessarily reveals the attorney's thought processes concerning the prosecution or defense of the case." *Curry*, 873 S.W.2d at 380. In this instance, the requestor seeks access to all records held by the district attorney related to a specific prosecution. We agree that this request encompasses the district attorney's entire case file for the referenced case. You assert that this information reflects the mental impressions and legal reasoning of the attorneys representing the state. You also contend that the information was gathered by an attorney in preparation for trial, and therefore constitutes attorney work product. Based on your representations and our review of the remaining information, we agree that section 552.108(a)(4) is applicable in this instance.

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure "basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime." Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Section 552.108(c) refers to the basic information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Co. v. City of*

Houston, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). We note that basic information includes a detailed description of the offense. *See Houston Chronicle*, 531 S.W.2d at 186-187; Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*).

Lastly, we note that an arrestee's social security number is confidential pursuant to section 552.147 of the Government Code,² which provides that "[t]he social security number of a living person is excepted from" required public disclosure under the Act. Accordingly, the district attorney must withhold the arrestee's social security number pursuant to section 552.147 of the Government Code.³

In summary, we conclude that: 1) the arrestee's social security number must be withheld under section 552.147 of the Government Code; and 2) with the exception of basic information, the district attorney may withhold the remaining submitted information pursuant to section 552.108(a)(4) of the Government Code. As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the

²Added by Act of May 23, 2005, 79th Leg., R.S., S.B. 1485, § 1, sec. 552.147(a) (to be codified at Tex. Gov't Code § 552.147).

³We note that section 552.147(b) of the Government Code authorizes a governmental body to redact a living person's social security number from public release without the necessity of requesting a decision from this office under the Act.

requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Vela III', with a stylized flourish at the end.

José Vela III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JV/krl

Ref: ID# 233797

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Tahira Khan Merritt
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(w/o enclosures)